

Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 00851

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, BL

SUBJECT: CURRENT LATIN AMERICAN PERCEPTION OF THE U.S.

REF: STATE 10605

SUMMARY: WE HAVE REVIEWED THE QUESTIONS RAISED IN STATE'S 010605 ON AN IN-HOUSE BASIS AND CONCLUDE THAT DECREASED BOLIVIAN DEPENDENCE ON THE U.S. MAY REFLECT SOME CHANGES IN BOLIVIA'S PERCEPTION OF THE U.S. POWER AND POLICIES. HOWEVER, MANY OF THE CHANGING BOLIVIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR OWN PROPER FOREIGN POLICY POSTURE ARE MORE LOGICALLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS AND BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE USG. THEY RELATE ONLY INDIRECTLY OR COINCIDENTALLY TO THE US GLOBAL POSITION. END SUMMARY.

1. BOLIVIA'S CONSERVATIVE MILITARY GOVERNMENT HAS REGISTERED PROGRESS IN STABILITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH. IT IS NOW ATTRACTING FOREIGN FUNDS FROM DIVERSIFIED SOURCES IN SHARP CONTRAST TO BOLIVIA'S PAST UNHEALTHY DEPENDENCY ON THE U.S. (FOR EXAMPLE IN 1975 AID DISBURSEMENTS CONSTITUTED 3.8 PERCENT OF ALL BOLIVIA'S PUBLIC SECTOR DISBURSEMENTS, COMPARED TO 21.6 PERCENT IN 1973). THIS SMALLER DIRECT U.S. INPUT COUPLED WITH ALTERNATIVE

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POSSIBILITIES OF SUPPORT, ASSISTANCE AND MARKETS MAY SUGGEST TO A FEW MEMBERS OF THE BANZER

GOVERNMENT THAT THERE MAY BE SOME PAINLESS ADVANTAGES TO BOLIVIA ADOPTING A MORE "THIRD WORLD" STANCE.

2. DESPITE AN OCCASIONAL INCIDENT WHERE BOLIVIA AND THE U.S. WERE NOT IN TOTAL ACCORD ON CERTAIN INTERNATIONAL ISSUES (ABSTENTION ON THE ZIONIST RESOLUTION, FOR EXAMPLE), THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT REMAINS WELL DISPOSED TOWARDS THE U.S. AND WELL AWARE OF ITS AWESOME ECONOMIC AND MILITARY POWER. ADDITIONALLY THE HABIT OF "CLIENTISM" DIE HARD. NATIONALISTIC BOLIVIANS MAY WELCOME THE DIMINUTION OF THEIR COUNTRY'S DEPENDENCY ON THE U.S. IN GENERAL WHILE STILL FEELING THAT THE "WEALTHY" U.S. COULD BE DOING "MORE" TO HELP BOLIVIA. INCREASED CRITICAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USG, THEREFORE, MAY BE FOUNDED ON THIS FAIRLY SIMPLE RATIONALE RATHER THAN ON ANY PROFOUND PHILOSOPHICAL REVISION OF PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. POWER OR PRESTIGE.

3. FOLLOWING ARE OUR REPLIES KEYED TO THE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS RAISED IN THE REFERENCED MESSAGE:

(A) THERE SEEMS NO DOUBT THAT THE FALL OF SOUTH VIETNAM WAS REGARDED BY THE BOLIVIANS AS A U.S. FAILURE AND CONSEQUENTLY AS A SETBACK TO U.S. PRESTIGE. HOWEVER, SOME SECTORS CONFESS TO RELIEF THAT AN UNREWARDING DRAIN ON U.S. RESOURCES AND ATTENTION HAS ENDED, DESPITE ITS UNFAVORABLE RESULT. MILITARY OFFICIALS, BUSINESSMEN, AND JOURNALISTS HAVE EXPRESSED PUZZLEMENT AND SOME DISMAY AT WATERGATE AND CERTAIN OTHER SYMPTOMS OF "CONFUSION" IN THE U.S. CONNOTING TO THEM "WEAKNESS" OR INDECISIVENESS." CERTAIN MILITARY OFFICERS MOREOVER HAVE STATED THAT THE U.S. MUST INFLUENCE (AND NOT JUST REACT TO) WORLD EVENTS AND CONSEQUENTLY NEEDS MECHANISMS SUCH AS THE CIA. SEVERAL LEADING BOLIVIANS BELIEVE THAT WE ARE GOING TOO FAR IN THE

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INVESTIGATION OF OUR INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES. HOWEVER, THE VITALITY OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM ALSO HAS COME ACROSS TO MANY. LABOR LEADERS AS WELL AS FORMER POLITICIANS HAVE EXPRESSED ADMIRATION FOR THE "VINDICATION OF U.S. DEMOCRACY AND ITS RULE OF LAW, ILLUSTRATED SO STRIKINGLY, IN THE WATERGATE CASE.

(B) THERE ARE CLEARLY SOME DOUBTS REGARDING THE WILLINGNESS OR ABILITY OF THE U.S.

TO FULFILL PAST INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS, AND EVEN MORE, REGARDING ITS WILLINGNESS OR ABILITY TO UNDERTAKE FUTURE ONES. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE AS REGARDS ASSISTING EXISTING REGIMES TO COMBAT ARMED INCURSIONS FROM OUTSIDE. THE LIKELIHOOD OF A LESS ACTIVIST AND A MORE PRUDENT U.S. POSTURE IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS MAY BE BETTER UNDERSTOOD IN THE BOLIVIAN GOVERNING CLASS THAN AMONG ITS OPPONENTS. IN BOLIVIA (AS ELSEWHERE) A PREFERENCE FOR IDENTIFYING WITH THE "WINNING SIDE" PROBABLY MEANS THAT VIETNAM HAS DECREASED, SLIGHTLY, THE FORMER COMFORTABLE CONFIDENCE IN US POWER.

(C) THERE IS A MISSION CONSENSUS THAT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE U.S. CONGRESS ARE NOT AT ALL CLEARLY PERCEIVED BY MOST BOLIVIANS. HOWEVER, ELEMENTS OF THE PRESS HAVE NOTED THE REDUCED EXECUTIVE FLEXIBILITY (E.G. TURKEY) IMPOSED BY CONGRESSIONAL AND EXECUTIVE DIFFERENCES. SOME BOLIVIAN MILITARY HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT EXECUTIVE DIFFERENCES WITH THE CONGRESS HAVE DECREASED THE USG'S RELIABILITY. MORE SOPHISTICATED OR POLITICALLY AWARE OBSERVERS CONSIDER SUCH DIFFERENCES AN INHERENT AND NOT UNHEALTHY TENSION INSTITUTIONALIZED IN THE U.S. CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM, BUT ARE CONCERNED THAT U.S. POWER MAY BE WEAKENED BY THE INABILITY OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH TO BE DECISIVE IN FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS.

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(D) IT IS UNLIKELY THAT MOST BOLIVIANS ARE AWARE OF MANY OF THE COMPLEXITIES OF US POLITICAL LIFE. HOWEVER, MANY APPRECIATE IN A GENERAL SENSE CONGRESS' ROLE IN APPROPRIATIONS. BOLIVIAN HIGH COMMAND FOR EXAMPLE, IS BELATEDLY BEGINNING TO REALIZE THE GREAT POWER WIELDED BY CONGRESS. BOLIVIAN INTEREST IN FOREIGN POLICY MEASURES REGARDING LATIN AMERICA PROBABLY FOCUSES MORE ON RESULTS THAN PROCESSES. SINCERITY MAY NOT BE AN IMPORTANT CRITERIA BUT EFFECTIVENESS IS. THEREFORE CERTAIN BOLIVIANS MAY BELIEVE THAT THE EXECUTIVE EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF LATIN AMERICAN ISSUES ARE "HALF-HEARTED" OR SPORADIC.

(E) THERE IS NOT SO MUCH CHANGE IN TRADITIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE U.S. AS A NEW

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9497

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AWARENESS OF THE REST OF THE WORLD, THE THIRD WORLD AND LATIN AMERICA. A MILITARY GOVERNMENT SUCH AS BOLIVIA'S, UNSURPRISINGLY BASES MANY OF ITS VIEWS ABOUT THE USG ON ITS PERFORMANCE IN THE AREA OF FOREIGN MILITARY ASSISTANCE WHICH THEY FIND CUMBERSOME AND SLOW. THE BOLIVIAN MILITARY HAVE BEEN SEEKING EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING FROM OTHER COUNTRIES DESPITE THEIR GENERAL PREFERENCE FOR U.S. SUPPLIES. OUTSIDE OF THE GOVERNMENT, THE REMAINING LEFTIST ELEMENTS IN THE COUNTRY PROBABLY LAMENT THE ABSENCE OF VIETNAM FROM THE HEADLINES (PARTICULARLY WHEN IT IS REPLACED BY SOVIET-CUBAN ADVENTURES IN ANGOLA). IN CONTRAST, MODERATE OPPONENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND CENTRIST LABOR LEADERS IN THE AFTERMATH OF VIETNAM PROBABLY NOW FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE WITH U.S. REPRESENTATIVES AND POSSIBLY MORE SYMPATHIC TO U.S. WORLDWIDE PROBLEMS. HOWEVER, OPPOSITION ATTITUDES ARE UNLIKELY TO HAVE MUCH IMPACT ON THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE HOST GOVERNMENT.

(F) CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA HAS EVOKED WIDESPREAD CRITICAL PRESS COMMENT. THE MILITARY SECTOR PROBABLY SEES THE SOVIET -CUBA ACTIVITIES AS CONFIRMATION OF THEIR ANTI-COMMUNIST "PRE-ANGOLA"

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SENTIMENTS.

(G) ELEMENTS OF THE BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT PROBABLY ARE INTERESTED IN EXPLORING THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF SOLIDARITY WITH SOME OF OUR MORE VOCAL LATIN AMERICAN CRITICS. THEY MIGHT ACCEPT A MORE CONFRONTATIONAL APPROACH THROUGH LATIN AMERICAN REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. HOWEVER, IN ISSUES IN WHICH THEY PERCEIVE DIRECT ADVANTAGES TO THEMSELVES, THE BOLIVIANS PROBABLY PREFER THE EXPEDITIOUS ROUTE OF BILATERALISM TO THE MORE TIME-CONSUMING MULTILATERAL APPROACH.

(H) WE DISCERN A CLEAR TREND OF THE GOB TO VOTE MORE FREQUENTLY WITH LATIN AMERICANS IN INTERNATIONAL FORMUMS SUCH AS THE UN. THEIR REDUCED DEPENDENCY ON THE USG AND AN INCREASED NATIONAL SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AUGUR THAT THIS TREND TOWARDS LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY WILL CONTINUE.

(I) IN LINE WITH THE DEVELOPMENTS DISCUSSED EARLIER, BOLIVIA ALSO IS LOOKING TOWARDS OTHER LATING AMERICAN COUNTRIES (PARTICULARLY BRAZIL AND VENEZUELA) IN BOTH THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FIELD. (VARIOUS LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE ALREADY EXPRESSED, PUBLICLY, MORAL AND EVEN FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR BOLIVIA'S OUTLET TO THE SEA). ADDITIONALLY, THE BOLIVIAN HIGH COMMAND DEFINITELY IS LOOKING ELSEWHERE FOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT LARGELY BECAUSE OF THE SLOW USG PROCESS OF APPROVING SALES, THE SUBSEQUENT DELAYED RECEIPT OF THE U.S. ARMS, AND BETTER FINANCIAL TERMS OFFERED BY OTHERS AT TIMES. THESE MOVES DO NOT JEOPARDIZE OUR ACCESS TO RAW MATERIALS OR TO MARKETS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY INDICATE THAT BOLIVIA IN THE FUTURE WILL NOT BE INCLINED AUTOMATICALLY TO GIVE US ANY PREFERENCE IN THESE AREAS.

(J) IN GENERAL, THE GOB AND MAY SECTORS OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT ACKNOWLEDGE AND APPRECIATE PAST U.S. ASSISTANCE AND GENERAL USG WILLINGNESS

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TO BE OF HELP. SOME CRITICS SEE U.S. AID AS MISDIRECTED "I.E. TOWARD RE-DISTRIBUTION RATHER THAN TOWARD INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT. THERE IS

ALSO CRITICISM OF U.S. POPULATION POLICIES.
HOWEVER, BOLIVIANS EXPECT THE U.S. TO CONTINUE TO
PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN AID TO LESS DEVELOPED
COUNTRIES. CRITICISM THAT DOES EXIST FOCUSES
MORE ON THE DIRECTION AND INSTITUTIONAL
CHANNELS OF OUR AID RATHER THAN THE INTENT OR
IMPORT OF OUR ASSISTANCE. BOLIVIANS RECOGNIZE
THAT THE U.S. IS THE MOST POWERFUL NATION IN THEIR
GEOGRAPHIC ORBIT AND THEY LOOK NATURALLY TO US
FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE WORLD BASED ON OUR
ECONOMIC AND MILITARY STRENGTH. THEY RESPECT
THE U.S., DO NOT WANT TO SEE IT WEAKENED, BUT
ARE STRIVING SUCCESSFULLY FOR A BOLIVIAN STANCE
COMPATIBLE WITH ITS LESS DEPENDENT, MORE MATURE
PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, WHICH IS FRIENDLY BUT AT
THE SAME TIME MORE IN KEEPING WITH ITS OWN
ANALYSIS OF ITS INTERESTS AND AWARE OF POSSIBLE
OPTIONS.
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